

1.933
AC 8
Cap 2

October 1, 1948

To: REA Field Representatives
From: Administrator
Subject: Action on Field Suggestions, Second Report

See:
1.933
AC 8

As was indicated in my memorandum dated August 26 regarding suggestions received at the REA field conferences, subsequent reports would be made as additional suggestions were studied and acted upon. This is our second report covering the suggestions listed below:

Follow-up on field reports and informing field representatives on decisions reached, commitments made, action taken (Suggestion No. 5-Roanoke-Management, No. 8-Butte-Applications and Loans, 4-R-Eng., 10-KC, 11-KC, 14-B-A&L, 3-R-Mgt., 2-B-Mgt., 4-B-Fin.).

Division chiefs and regional heads have been requested in my memorandum of August 26 to note these suggestions and redouble efforts to provide the best follow-up possible in the face of a large work load and a limited staff. Where immediate action is not possible, efforts will be made to give reasons and acknowledge that a delay may be necessary before corrective steps can be taken. One objective of the recent additions to the staff, such as the assistant regional heads in Engineering and A & L, is to achieve a closer contact with the field.

Annual inservice program for all power use personnel (33-KC).

Serious consideration is being given to setting up a training program for new power use personnel and also to provide an opportunity for the present staff to attend conferences and schools especially designed for their needs.

Less diversion of field power use specialists to other work (26-KC).

The importance of a coordinated power use program to the success of the REA program is recognized. The fact that at times power use field people have had to be assigned to other work reflects a situation wherein personnel for handling loan work was inadequate to meet the growing load. The loan program work obviously had to be given priority. During the coming year the problem should be helped by the fact that 23 new fieldmen for handling loan work have been authorized.

More prompt dispatching of equipment and literature (21-KC).

Two steps have been taken to help this problem:

First, the shipment of demonstration equipment in and out of the Washington office can be speeded up as a result of arrangements that now have been made permitting home economists to initiate bills of lading in the field. This will expedite return of equipment so that it will be more readily available for the next request.

2-REA Field Representatives

Second, the new A & L assistant regional heads will be working with the power use program in each region and this will serve to expedite handling of requests for literature.

The need continues, however, for placing orders for literature and equipment as far in advance of the time needed as possible. Shipments of publications, for example, are not made directly by REA but by a separate warehouse which handles shipment of all USDA literature. It is difficult, therefore, to assure satisfactory handling of rush orders.

Encouraging borrowers to raise office staff standards (6-B-Fin.).

It has always been an REA practice to assist borrowers in every manner possible, including the training of their employees, to operate as efficiently and economically as possible.

Forwarding mail to fieldmen (12-B-Eng.).

Supervisors in each of the line divisions are being asked to have the words "Please Forward" typed in the lower left-hand corner of envelopes addressed to field personnel in care of a cooperative. If the correspondence obviously needs to be used in connection with the fieldmen's business at the co-op, the envelope will be marked "Please Hold."

Field personnel necessarily will have to leave forwarding instructions at the co-op office on their departure.

Recommendations regarding regional newsletters (3-4-5-6-12-B-A & L).

The Applications and Loans Division, which uses the regional newsletters, is calling these worthwhile suggestions to the attention of all its regional heads.

Field trips for Applications and Loans examiners (10-B-A & L).

The Applications and Loans Division advises that in several instances examiners have been given limited field assignments in connection with applications they were processing. The suggestion has merit and consideration will be given to furthering this practice.

Making allowance for unavoidable expenditures for special educational activities (32-KC).

Each travel authorization, Form AD-202, authorizes employees to purchase necessary supplies and incur necessary incidental expenses to carry out their official assignments. There are certain types of purchases, however, that field personnel generally cannot be authorized to make. They are: (a) purchases of nonexpendable equipment, (b) printing and binding, and (c) publications.

Speedier processing of expense vouchers (6-R-Fin., 15-KC, 1m-B-Eng.).

The REA staff will make a sincere effort to expedite the payment of travel vouchers by giving attention to prompt handling in the regional offices and by keeping an adequate voucher audit staff. Travelers themselves can

3-REA Field Representatives

help reduce the time required for processing vouchers by: (a) preparing accurate vouchers, fully supported, (b) submitting vouchers immediately after the first of each month, (c) submitting vouchers directly to their respective regions, and (d) by arranging for checks to be mailed direct to banks or to a permanent address.

In keeping with good business practice, the travel voucher audit staff is maintained at a level that, as nearly as possible, will have a monthly work output equal to the volume of vouchers received each month. Vouchers are processed on a first-in, first-out basis. Therefore, vouchers received early in the month normally clear within a few days and those received later will clear not later than 30 days from the date received in the voucher audit unit.

After vouchers have been approved for payment in REA, they are forwarded to the Treasury Department. Checks are usually issued within the next 10 days.

To minimize some of the inconvenience resulting from the length of voucher processing time, advances are available to travelers. Up to \$480 may be advanced to regular travelers who are authorized to travel by privately-owned automobile; up to \$300 to regular travelers who travel by common carriers, and up to \$6.00 a day to occasional travelers for each day authorized on the trip authorization.

Eliminating time slips (16-KC).

Some form of time record is obviously necessary. The General Accounting Office requires (General Regulations No. 102) the use of Standard Form No. 1130 for the purpose of reporting the time worked, time on annual leave, time on sick leave, or time while in a leave-without-pay status.

Adding machines or calculators for auditors (24-KC, 5-B-Fin.).

The Finance Division will poll field auditors to determine how many believe that an adding machine or calculator would materially assist them in their work.

Giving auditors with proved ability senior grade rating (3-B-Fin., 2b-R-Fin.).

It is the policy of the Finance Division to recommend the promotion, provided CAF-9 vacancies exist, of auditors to the CAF-9 grade when they have demonstrated their ability to perform the most difficult audits independently and without supervision. This conforms to the general policy of the agency with reference to promotions. Demonstrated ability is generally shown by the successful completion of several independent audits of the most difficult variety. Grade CAF-7 auditors are expected to be able to perform successfully average audits which do not present unusually complex situations.

4-REA Field Representatives

Adequate field staffs (5-KC).

Every effort is being made to recruit a field staff to fill all positions permitted under the agency's budget. There is a shortage of qualified engineers with experience in the design and construction of generating plants and transmission and distribution lines. Any help that field employees can give by referring the names of qualified engineers to the Personnel Division will be appreciated. The Civil Service examination for engineers is open indefinitely. The Personnel Division will be glad to furnish full information to any prospective applicants.

Allowing more time between advertisement of vacancies and application closing date (22-KC).

Personnel Bulletins advertising vacancies of interest to field personnel will henceforth carry a closing date for applications 15 calendar days after date of issuance. Even though Personnel Bulletins may be received with little or no time remaining before the closing date, any interested field employee is nevertheless urged to apply at once, by wire if necessary. Every application from field people will receive consideration right up to the time the vacancy is actually filled, regardless of the announced closing date.

More prompt action on converting war service appointments to regular status (28-KC).

The Personnel Division is making every effort to convert appointments of nonstatus employees to permanent appointments as rapidly as possible. In the case of field personnel, much progress has been made. All field engineers now have status and only four field auditors remain without status. Every effort is being made to obtain status for the remaining auditors through eligibility ratings received from the various Civil Service regional examinations. All other nonstatus field personnel is expected to attain status through Civil Service examinations covering all REA field positions (except auditors.) Registers of eligibles from these examinations are expected to be ready very soon. As employees are certified for permanent status they are notified promptly.

Upgrading of field audit positions (2a-R-Fin., 25-KC, 2-B-Fin.).

The Civil Service Commission now has underway a study of accounting and audit positions throughout the Government for the purpose of writing job standards. As soon as these standards are published, the Personnel Division will make a survey of the field audit positions in accordance with the request of the field audit staff.

Prompt and accurate filling of requests for supplies (4-R-Fin.).

Careful consideration of this problem has convinced us that the regional offices should continue to carry the responsibility for furnishing field representatives with necessary supplies. The regional offices have more

5-REA Field Representatives

direct interest in filling field orders and also have available current addresses of field representatives. Therefore, we have, by memorandum, urged all regional heads to give greater attention to this important matter to see that all requests for supplies are acted upon with all possible dispatch.

More expeditious handling of mail within REA (3-R-Fin., 7-R-Mgt., 8-R-Mgt., 5-B-Eng., 2m-B-Eng.).

Test checks of messenger service efficiency disclose that average elapsed time between pickup and delivery of mail is two hours and forty minutes. Messengers make five trips daily, or an average of one run each one and one-half hours. Our mail distribution procedure is outlined briefly for the information of fieldmen.

Incoming mail is received six times daily from the USDA post office. The mail is classified by subject matter and delivered by messenger to the various division mail rooms. The messenger at the same time picks up mail previously sorted by division mail clerks and delivers it to the regional offices. From the regional offices he brings outgoing mail to the division mail room for sorting. Intradivisional mail is distributed on the next run and interdivisional and outside mail is brought to the REA mail unit for sorting and distribution. Outgoing communications are reviewed by the Administrator's Mail Review Unit for conformance to established policy before they are dispatched.

Constant effort is made to attain the peak of efficiency in mail pickup and distribution and this phase of the mail service appears to be satisfactory. It is evident, therefore, that any delays with reference to mail are occasioned chiefly in the offices of the persons responsible for making reply. We have called this matter to the attention of all Washington employees charged with answering incoming mail and have urged that they devote to this phase of our work the effort it deserves.

Purchase of recording machines and approval of reimbursement for stenographic service (8-R-A & L, 5-R-Eng., 2-R-Mgt., 12-KC, 13-B-A & L).

Effective immediately, field employees are authorized to use public stenographers for typing official Government reports or correspondence and may be reimbursed for such cost in an amount not to exceed \$15 per employee per month. In view of this authorization for stenographic services it is expected that the need for recording machines will be slightly limited. As indicated in our first report, three recording machines are in use at present. Since then, ten additional machines (Mail-A-Voice) have been ordered. Field personnel who are interested may send in their requests for these machines. Because of the expense element, the distribution of machines will be determined by the recommendation of the appropriate Division Chief. Additional procurement of machines must, of necessity, depend upon the availability of funds as well as an estimate of their value and efficiency as gained through experience.

6-REA Field Representatives

Necessity for a new REA Division (9-KC).

The establishment of the Power Division was deemed necessary because of the increasing importance and significance of power supply activities to the progress of the rural electrification program. With all activities concerned with power supply--both generated and purchased--brought together in one division, it is our belief that borrowers will receive thereby maximum service from REA in the solution of their growing power requirement problems. Since the establishment of the new division did not involve any changes in REA policy or activities, generally any additional people hired by the new division for power supply activities would have been needed for the same activities if the new division had not been established.

Giving fieldmen and borrowers explanation when amount of note and amount of loan contract differs (30-KC).

In the future all letters to borrowers concerning a new loan will contain appropriate information when the note is not for the full amount of the loan. A copy of this letter will be sent to the A & L fieldman interested.

More current information on regional operating statistics (2-KC).

Regional operating statistics on an annual basis are now available. Similar data on a more frequent basis will be available in the near future when plans have been completed for compiling these statistics with punch card equipment.

Providing portable file cases (10-R-A & L).

An order has been placed for 100 legal and 25 letter size file cases for the use of field employees. Delivery is expected within thirty days. Several field and office employees examined the case and all were of the opinion that it would be a real aid to the field employees. The case is metal, is equipped with dividers and handles, and has a removable top which makes filing practicable without removing the case from an automobile trunk.

Objecting to approval of work orders without field approval (4m-B-Eng.).

It is recognized that all work orders should have the approval of the REA field engineer before being submitted to Washington.

There are, however, times when the field engineer is unable to give prompt attention to the review of work orders and the resultant delays cause hardships because of the immediate need of funds by the borrower. In such cases, the work orders may be sent direct to Washington by the borrower.

All work orders processed by the Washington office without prior field approval are approved by the Engineering Division for design only, and subject to the final approval of the field engineer and by the Finance Division subject to verification of cost by the field auditor.

7-REA Field Representatives

Confidential reports to be kept confidential (4-KC, 6-B-Eng., 7-B-A & L).

We fully concur in the suggestion made by field representatives that more care on everyone's part in preparing and handling field reports is necessary. It would be most helpful if field representatives always stated the basis--personal observation, verbal reports, etc.--on which their recommendations or comments are made. With this knowledge proper action may be taken in such a manner as to avoid bad feelings, misunderstandings, or unfavorable working relations between field and cooperative personnel.

Claude R. Wickard

